QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

BIRCH
Betula lenta

Plant Family: Betulaceae

Extraction Method: Steam Distilled

Part Utilized: Bark

Region of Origin:
U.S.A.

AFFINITY FOR:
muscles and joints, nerves, urinary system, lymphatic system, lung meridian

THERAPEUTIC PROPERTIES:
anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, disinfectant

AROMATIC CONSIDERATIONS:
Birch awakens the senses, increasing awareness and alertness.

APPLICATION:
Birch should be applied, well diluted, to areas of pain or inflammation.

INGREDIENT IN:
LeBreezey, LeDeeper, LeEZ Traveler, LeFortitude, LePaine

EMOTIONAL-SPIRITUAL-MENTAL ASPECTS:
Sometimes we get into a frame of mind where we are very much afraid of the truth. We are sure that we will not be able to handle the truth if it is forced upon us. We spend a lot of mental and emotional energy hiding from the truth. Birch is eye opening. It shatters our illusions and brings us up against reality. This sounds harsh, but honesty in looking at oneself is a liberating force. The most important truth we can learn in this life is the truth about our own motivations. This truth will truly set us free and Birch essential oil can help us grasp it and keep hold of it.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS:
Birch essential oil has analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. It is useful for arthritis, muscle and bone pain, tendonitis, osteoporosis, and any inflammatory condition. Birch is also a treatment for bladder infections, recurring cystitis, gout, edema, and kidney stones. Birch helps with eczema and other skin disorders. One of its outstanding uses is reducing fevers.

GENERAL INFORMATION:
One of the key compounds in Birch (and Wintergreen) essential oil is methyl salicylate. In Birch oil, this compound makes up 85-90% of the oil. Methyl salicylate is an aspirin-like compound which has much the same effect on muscles and nerves as cortisone, but as a constituent of an essential oil it does not have the side-effects of cortisone. Methyl salicylate is easily and cheaply produced in laboratories, but the man-made substitute has very toxic side effects. This is not true of Birch essential oil—in spite of what you may have heard or read. There are two basic reasons for the natural one being harmless and the chemical version being deadly.

The first has to do with molecular structure. Methyl salicylate is comprised of 19 atoms—8 of carbon, 8 of hydrogen, and 3 of oxygen. Imagine how many different combinations could be made using these "building blocks." Nature makes only one methyl salicylate. Forced together in a laboratory, this set of atoms combine into 25 known structures called isomers. The components of each isomer are the same but the structure is different. Two of these isomers are quite similar to natural methyl salicylate but are not quite right! Different isomers of the same compound can have entirely different, often opposite, properties—some helpful, most harmful. This is the case with man-made methyl salicylate. It has nasty side effects.

Secondly, the 10-15% of other compounds that occur naturally in Birch oil balances the methyl salicylate and keep it from being toxic. This "balancing act" of naturally occurring compounds is common in the natural world. (The lack of balancing components is why drugs have side effects and herbs do not!!) Research done by aromatherapists of the British school of thought was conducted using perfume grade essential oils (in other words, synthetic laboratory produced oils diluted in carrier oil). This research has been given extensive coverage in print. These synthetic oils proved toxic—even when diluted. The research has no relevance to the safety or efficacy of pure therapeutic grade essential oils. Therapeutic grade Birch essential oil is safe to use; synthetic reproductions are not!

I visited a web site where it was explained that Birch oil had aggravated a toxic condition established by medications which contained large amounts of "fake" methyl salicylate. This was cited as a reason to not use Birch essential oil at all. The fact that the reaction was set up by the synthetic compound was brushed aside as irrelevant. It was assumed that the reaction would have been the same with pure Birch oil.

Although the natural and the man-made compounds have the same name, they are not the same! A study of simple chemistry shows this clearly. (See Dr. David Stewart's book The Chemistry of Essential Oils Made Simple, page 221). The methyl salicylate in the Birch oil continued to aggravate the condition because the natural compounds meant to balance it were insufficient for a battle against the synthetic compound in the medications and the natural compound in the Birch oil at the same time. More simply put, the "balancing" substances in the Birch were sufficient for the Birch; they were wholly inadequate to deal with a deliberate drug over-dose.

Essential oils heal because they are naturally occurring substances, balanced by nature and nature's Creator. They heal quickly, without the side effects of drugs. Never forget, drugs have side effects!!